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A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'CECIL'S TRYST,' &c.

CHAPTER I.—AT THE MITRE.

It is early summer and early morning in the most picturesque of English cities—Oxford. Nobody is astir in the gray streets; the heavy college gates, and even the small posterns cut in them (for the admission of gay young undergraduate dogs after hours) are as yet unclosed. The parks and pleasure-grounds are all deserted, under whose stately trees so many generations of youth have dreamed their day-dreams. The quads, with their trim lawns, which have echoed for centuries to boyish laughter, are silent. The plaintive caw of the half-awakened rooks, as the swaying elm-tree rocks them, alone is heard, save the voice of Time itself—the Guardian Time, who here holds all things in its solemn keeping. First the four musical quarters, and then the five beats of the iron tongue. From a score of ancient churches issue the same warning sounds, and silence reigns again, more indisputably than ever. In other places, at such an hour, Time's voice seems to make solemn protest: 'A quarter gone; two; three; four. Another hour, poor mortals, from the sum of your days; and yet you spend it sleeping!' But Time is at home here, and does not preach. What need for preaching, in a place where every stone is a sermon? Other cities have withstood sieges; other cities have brought forth martyrs; other cities (not many) can date their origin from earlier ages. But this one is far more venerable (save to the mere antiquary), as being that city in which the years of man, in place of being threescore years and ten, are three, or if (by reason of idleness or stupidity) they reach to four years and over, the surplus age is labour and sorrow, and its end a bathos.

To dwell here even a year after one's fellows have departed (except the College Fellows) is to feel old indeed. To return hither after a few years is to experience the feelings of Rip van

Winkle. *Alma Mater* is a hard mother, though she spoils her children. 'Come,' she says, 'eat, drink, and be merry in this pleasant place: for what saith the Preacher: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." And the young men obey her gladly. But when three years, or four at most, are over, she saith: 'Arise, and go into the world, and return hither no more: but make way for others.'

To how many has she thus been the home and the grave of joy! How many have spent with her their 'palmy days'—their only ones—and found the world the harder for the contrast! How many, in bidding good-bye to her, have bidden good-bye to Comfort, Ease, Light-heartedness, and taken Want and unrewarded Toil as their companions through life's long journey in their place! Even the rich leave here their blithest days behind, and with them but too often the open hand, the tender heart, soon to be closed and hardened by the consciousness of 'great possessions.' For while here, rich and poor are alike (or nearly so), and Liberty, Equality, Fraternity for one brief epoch reign, no shadowy triumvirate. O golden youth! O happy time! never, never to return again: each clock-tongue seems its knell.

Such thoughts, or thoughts like these, are passing through the mind of Arthur Tyndall, as he stands at the corner of a silent street, and looks at his old college—left some five years back, which seem to him a century. He cannot help entertaining them (though in a particular rather than a general way), notwithstanding that he is by no means given to sentiment. He has been to the ends of the earth since he dwelt yonder, and has witnessed, and doubtless taken part in, reckless

doings: his face, which was here as fair as a girl's, has had the tropic sun upon it; his hands, here hardened only by the oar, have made acquaintance with the spade, the gun, the sail; his beard is grown, and hangs low over his broad chest. But for the moment he is a boy again. Scenes of light-hearted mirth and wild high spirits, quite different from the saturnalia of his later days, are recurring to him; the noon of friendship, and the dawn of love. He has his friends still; and one the same that was his dearest friend at college, Jack Adair. Jack and he were always one, though so different in position and character. Hard-working, steady Jack had always had his own way to make in the world; while for Arthur it had been ready made, or seemed to be so. What a fool had he been to anger the governor by his extravagance, and then to run such a muck abroad, that when the poor old man deceased, and left him all, it had been almost all discounted beforehand. If he had only known that Swansdale would have been his own so soon; and even now, if it was not so heavily dipped—Here Arthur Tyndall stroked his beard, and sighed. In disinterring his dead past, he had come upon a regret which had some life in it; or if dead, it had a ghost which haunted him.

One, two, three, four, five, six—a single chapel-bell begins to ring with importunate shrillness, and footsteps are heard in the High Street, though every shutter is still closed. Two undergraduates in 'flannels,' with towels in their hands, are going to the river to bathe; they might have been Jack and he, six years ago. They used to bathe a good deal, and go down the river a good deal in those days; which latter thing it was natural enough to do, since Swansdale Hall was on the river, and Jack was almost as welcome there as himself. He had not seen the old place for near six years, however: there would be change, no doubt, in it; and people change even more than places. So much the better, sometimes, when they do. Again he strokes his soft brown beard and sighs, this time articulately: 'I wonder whether Jenny is married.' Then: 'Bah! what does it matter! I'm a nice fellow to grow faint with romantic memories. I wonder what Allardyce's opinion would be upon that subject, or Jack's (no, not Jack's—Jack is soft himself), or anybody else's who knows me. There goes the quarter. We were to breakfast at six sharp. That excellent old lady will be saying: "Ellen, your Harthur's late." Poor Helen! Well, I daresay I shall make a good husband, as husbands go: only, somehow I wish she wasn't quite so fond of me. I wonder whether Jenny will be at the inn as usual.'

This last reflection was made at the very threshold of the *Mitre*, but it was not that inn to which he referred. At that respectable hotel were located at present Mrs Somers and her daughter Helen, to whom he was betrothed; and a very pretty girl she was—for a blonde. It is one of the many evidences of the false and feeble frivolity of the days on which we have fallen, that dark women try to become of light complexion. It would be bad enough if the case were *vice versa*, but there would at least be some reason in it. 'Black for beauty, chestnut for'—well, for many excellent things, no doubt—for prettiness, softness, gentleness, and high breeding, for example—but not for

beauty. Helen Somers was at least a *bond-fide* blonde; her hair was her own—at least some of it—not dyed nor 'tinted'; her complexion, which was pure and soft as milk, owed nothing to the perfumer's art; her features were a trifle large, but then she was altogether on a large scale (as all noble creatures are), and every feature was perfect of its kind. Her eyes were blue, but by no means of an insipid blue; they could flash like a sword, if need were, and even on trifling provocation. Do not, however, picture to yourself a virago. As she rises from her chair at the open window of the sitting-room (where she has been watching), to welcome the man she loves, she has a charming air. 'A Juno with the chill off,' Jack Adair once called her, when discussing her with his friend, quite unconscious of the latter's *design* to be her Jupiter; but, indeed, he did her less than justice. You might walk for a week in any English town save London, and all over the continent for the term of your natural life, without meeting so fair a sight in the way of womankind as Helen Somers. Her misfortune was that at present she was always coupled in public with that stately dame, her mother; and the conclusion to which the reflective mind at once leaped, upon beholding them together, was that the daughter, in what might be very literally termed 'the fulness of time,' would develop into just such another as her mamma. She was a Juno with a vengeance, and 'with the chill off,' even in the coolest of weathers. Her complexion had, from long standing, turned from milk to cream. She was not only on a large scale, but on the largest—the same as that on which the Ordnance Survey used to be, when it was jobbed by private persons, in order to secure maps of their estates. Her eyes—well, what there was of them was also blue; but you couldn't always see her eyes. When Jack first beheld her, apprehension on his friend's account is said to have caused him to ejaculate: 'The Blonde, or Twenty Years Hence; in any number of volumes, or quarts.'

But there was one thing in which Helen Somers would never resemble her mother. Long residence in a colony may cause persons to write little 'i's instead of big 'I's'; but when you have once got your aspirates, they keep in any climate. Helen would never drop her 'h's, as 'poor dear mamma' dropped hers. This was a fatal blot in the Somers' escutcheon, and the innocent cause thereof was unhappily aware of it. 'It's all along of my 'uskiness—there it is again, you see—I mean huskiness; ever, since last autumn, when I caught that cold at Emel Emstead.' But it was not last autumn, nor the autumn before that, in which Mrs Somers lost her 'h's; and, moreover, she often found them when they were not wanted. It was terrible to Helen to hear herself called Ellen; but when her mother talked of 'Harthur,' her kindred flesh and blood crept and curdled as though a goose were walking over her grave.

Helen was the first of her race who had overcome the difficulties of the aspirate, and she had not only the zeal of the convert—she had the bitterness of the apostate. She was very impatient with the paganism that she had discarded for a more enlightened faith, and abhorred the shocking stories that were afloat about this family failing. There was one dreadful tale extant about Somers père with relation to this infirmity. He had been a clerk in the Bank of England, and upon a certain

dividend day, being in charge of the letter A only, was worried by an old lady from the country whose name was Lawrence. 'Please to give me my dividend, young man,' she kept repeating in that importunate and peremptory tone used only by spinster ladies who have dividends. 'Go to L,' said Mr Somers with sharpness, and unhappily making use of the aspirate. Instead of obeying his well-meant direction, she returned to her hotel, and wrote a letter of complaint to the Chairman and Governors of the Bank of England; and Mr Somers was within a hair-breadth of losing his situation in consequence. He did not lose it, however; and being a prudent man, and having a good head for business, he speculated with his little savings with success. A venture in Hops eventually crowned his efforts with a fortune, and he became a gentleman at large; in gratitude to Fortune, he took the plant which had befriended him for his crest, and its name (which he understood to be the classical term for wealth) for his motto; and for the rest of his brief existence was familiarly known as *ops* Somers. He died, leaving his widow well provided for, and his only daughter an heiress.

From that time, Mrs Somers began to 'move' in society, at first with difficulty, but as her Helen grew up, with greater ease. The possession of such a transferable treasure made the widow welcome everywhere. Nobody would have guessed that she had once been a Methodist, and thought tea and shrimps a treat. She had a very stately carriage, and might have easily been mistaken for a duchess, if she had only been dumb. In her daughter, the Darwinian theory received a triumphant corroboration. This young lady's grand-parents on both sides had been very inferior specimens of humanity, residing principally at low-water mark; her parents were what we have described them to be; while she herself was a triumph of civilisation. She talked French with a good accent; played the harp well, and the piano divinely; and was as well acquainted with English literature as most Lady Maries or Lady Janes—she knew very little about it. Her tastes were what they should be. She liked Blue Blood, though she did not express herself so ecstatically upon the subject as did her mother.

It was this admirable quality—which Arthur Tyndall inherited in perfection from the mother's side, though only in a moderate degree from his father's—that had chiefly influenced Mrs Somers in his favour. He was not rich; it was well understood that Swansdale was heavily mortgaged; but his family had an excellent position in the county. He had sown his wild-oats abroad, which was an immense advantage, and he was now going 'to settle down' as a country gentleman. In view of these considerations, she had 'thrown the young people together' designedly, and with complete success. Helen had fallen in love with Arthur, and in a well-meaning attempt to extricate her, he had met with a similar fate; it was impossible to resist the despair which his studied coolness begot in those eloquent blue eyes; and besides, as has been said, Swansdale was sadly 'dipped.' How pleasant was the prospect of regaining all his folly had lost, and more, by one stroke of his pen in a marriage register! He was too much of a gentleman, however, to put it in that coarse way, even to himself; and as time

went on, and this beautiful being shewed her blind attachment towards him more and more, he began to honestly reciprocate it, though in a less passionate manner. They had been engaged for some weeks, and the marriage itself was to take place shortly. In the meantime, Arthur had invited Helen and her mother to stay at Swansdale Hall, where Mrs Ralph Tyndall, his sister-in-law, had promised (with her daughter Blanche) to join them, to play the hostess, and do 'propriety.' He had planned a river-voyage for them from Oxford, as the pleasantest means of approaching the Hall, and invited a male friend or two to accompany the little party. He was rather more fond of bachelor society, perhaps, than an engaged man ought to be, and Helen had pouted a little at this unnecessary addition or no less than three 'horrid men,' to what would have been almost a *tête-à-tête* (since mamma slept a good deal when in the open air); but Arthur had assured her that these fellows would talk to one another, and leave her sweet self and him even more 'at liberty' (to cast sheep's-eyes, to press one another's hands beneath the table, and generally 'to spoon,' he meant), than if they had not been there. In that case, they were welcome enough, whoever they might be. Mr Adair she knew, but not the Hon. Wynn Allardyce and Mr Paul Jones. These gentlemen's services, it must be premised, were not required as oarsmen. The river-voyage was to be on board a barge.

'But, good gracious, Mr Tyndall, won't it spoil our things?' had been good Mrs Somers' horrified exclamation, when she had been informed of this project. Her imagination had pictured a coal-barge; and even now, in spite of all explanation, she had her misgivings. 'Is the barge covered over? Will it be quite empty? I hope, my dear child, it will never devolve upon myself or you to steer?' were questions hazarded that very morning to her daughter, that shewed a mind ill at ease respecting this mode of transit.

'My dear mamma,' Helen had replied, 'how can you be so distrustful of Arthur's sense of what is fitting! Do you suppose he would place us in such a position?'

'I can only say, my love,' persisted the dowager, 'that women *do* steer in barges; I have seen them often—standing in a hole at the stern, so that only three-quarters of them are visible, and generally with a red cotton handkerchief round their heads. The men do nothing but smoke pipes and swear. A small dog runs from side to side—which of itself would make one very nervous—and barks incessantly.'

'There will be neither swearing nor barking on board *our* vessel, mamma; of that you may be sure; though I will not answer for the smoking. Arthur and Mr Adair are very fond of their cigars, and it would be cruel to deny them that pleasure.'

'Very good, my dear; you will do as you think best; though, for my part, I never let your poor father draw a whiff until the last thing at night, and always in the kitchen. "Arry," said I, "I will never let my 'ouse become a pot'ouse."'

'Hush, mamma, *please*,' said Helen imploringly from the open window. 'Here is Arthur.'

Mrs Somers cleared her throat apologetically, for she knew from her daughter's tone that its 'huskiness' had been more pronounced than usual, and sat down corrected, to make the coffee.

CHAPTER II.—TWO NICE YOUNG MEN.

'What a charming day we have!' said Arthur cheerfully, after an affectionate salutation of his Helen, and a cordial one of her mother. 'What wind there is will be with us, so that we shall be at Swansdale a good hour before dinner—if only Jack and the rest are as punctual this morning as you ladies. You are patterns both of you.'

'I've been used to early rising all my life,' said the dowager; 'that is,' she added, correcting herself, 'whenever I am in the country I always make a point of it. I love to hear the cock crow and all that.'

Helen raised her perfect eyebrows a hair-breadth. 'I think you must mean the lark, dear mamma.'

'Nonsense; the lark does not crow, child; but, for the matter of that, I mean all the birds. I dote on birds.—We had a beautiful Poll parrot once, Mr Tyndall, who was a great pet of *your* pet's' (and here she looked archly towards her daughter); 'as tame as a magpie it was, and which we valued greatly, because it was a present from a friend of my poor husband's who was drowned at sea. Only, whenever it saw a clergyman, it *would* cry out: "Hooray! now let us pray." That used to annoy good Mr Bung so—don't you remember, my dear!—when he was about to ask a blessing.'

'Mr Bung was *not* a clergyman, mamma,' observed Helen severely, for (next to those of the aspirate) she was a stickler above all things for the rights and privileges of the Church of England.

'Very true, my dear; but he *thought* he was,' contended the old lady, unwilling that her favourite story should be depreciated; 'and so did the parrot; so you needn't take one up so sharp.'

'Would you like to drive or walk to the river-side, ladies?' inquired the cavalier. 'It is but about a quarter of a mile to the place where the barge is moored.'

'Oh, let us walk, by all means,' cried Helen. 'It's beautifully cool, mamma' (for she well knew her parent's objection to pedestrian exercise); 'and it isn't really worth while to take a carriage for such a little way.'

'As to worth while, my dear,' said the old lady, bridling, 'pray, do not let it be supposed that the money is an object; you need not be so dreadfully economical, I am sure. Mr Tyndall has been out already this morning, remember, and I daresay has had enough of walking; and since he pays for the barge, or whatever it is, and the provisions and all that, I think the least we can do is to give him a lift.'

Arthur laughed good-humouredly, with an amused look at Helen, which went far to mitigate her chagrin, at this terrible speech, and assured the old lady that he felt quite equal to walking the quarter of a mile.

'Is your luggage ready?' inquired he.

'All but the directions,' said the dowager. 'I waited till you came, because I didn't know whether to have *The Welcome* put on the labels, or "Swansdale Hall."'

The idea of labelling luggage from which the proprietors were never to be parted, nor even to lose sight of it for a moment, was absurd enough; but it was in a grave and hasty tone that Tyndall replied: 'Oh, not "*the Welcome*" certainly. It is true

that the things will be taken out there, as being the nearest place to the Hall from the river-side, but somebody will be sent to fetch them. If addressed to "*the Welcome*," the good people at the inn might think we were going to stop there, which would be a disappointment to them.'

'That's just like your thought, Harthur,' cried the old lady admiringly. 'You are so kind, as I often say to Ellen, to poor folks and such-like, that you will never make a very bad husband.'

'Does she maintain I *shall*, then?' inquired Arthur mischievously.

'Lor, Harthur, how *can* you?' ejaculated the old lady. 'There, now, see if you haven't made Ellen downright angry. I shall leave you two together, to make it up.'

The beautiful Helen was certainly looking somewhat stiff and statuesque, not to say white-marbly; but no sooner had her mother left the room than she softened like Pygmalion's statue, and, with many a blush and smile, assured her swain that she had never doubted but that he would make the best and dearest husband in the world, and that she only hoped she might be worthy of him. Such extravagant aspirations are not, perhaps, very valuable in any case, by whichever side they are expressed, but it is surely less becoming that they should proceed from Phyllis than Philemon. She may have her faults and foibles, but it is her gentle shepherd who, generally speaking, at least, has more cause for penitence, and need of amendment. The animal Man, indeed, though audacious and self-asserting to extremity in books, and among fellow-creatures of his own sex, is secretly well aware of this circumstance; and when the Angel Woman, with drooping eyelids and folded wings, thus abases herself before him, he has twinges. Mr Arthur Tyndall had very sincere twinges, I think, for he replied gravely: 'My dear Helen, it is you who will have to forgive things, and not I. You remind me of the pictorial advertisement that we saw upon the walls, last night, of the Queen of the Lions, whose mission, it seems, is to tame the beasts of the forest by her beauty and gentleness, supplemented, I daresay, by an occasional flip with her whip. Doubtless, she is not unnecessarily severe upon them, so long as they bear the pressure of her dainty foot upon their necks submissively, but she never talks of being "*worthy* of them." Now, I have been a wildish sort of animal myself, dear—that is, I mean,' added he hastily, at a slight contraction of Helen's white brow—'an untamed one. I've been knocked about a good deal in roughish weather.' Here, whether conscious that his metaphors were getting confused, or reminded of some particular storm in which he had thrown over a valuable cargo of morals, Arthur blushed and hesitated. 'I've never been used to go twice to church on Sundays, Helen, and all that,' he blurted out; 'but I do hope I am not a bad fellow at bottom, and that you will never repent having said: "*Yes, Arthur*," in that low sweet tone of yours, which I love to hear better than any music in the world.' Here he became inarticulate, and settled, like a bee upon a flower, on her willing lips, with a murmurous um—um—um—um; to which she replied with a pleased purr.

It was the most absurd thing in the world to a looker-on (though the most natural thing possible to the two performers), and that was why the waiter, who entered at that moment rather hastily,

was obliged to find an outlet for his mirth in a series of apoplectic coughs, as he set about removing the breakfast things. Helen vanished in an instant. Arthur remained at the open window, staring at an ecclesiastical edifice, and muttering such anathemas against the inopportune intruder as could have been invented only in the first ages of the church.

An hotel waiter with a strong sense of humour must find it very difficult to keep his situation.

Then the procession started for the river. Mrs Somers, filled with dread imaginings as to the description of vessel that she was to find at the moorings, maintained an awe-struck silence until the place of embarkation was reached, when she rapturously exclaimed: 'O lor, 'ow nice!'

What met her gaze was a Cleopatra's galley—a mighty gondola, the one half a stately cabin, glittering with plate-glass and gilding, and decorated with a huge silken flag, while the bows were already occupied by sundry hampers, suggestive of a bountiful collation. The crew consisted of three men, one of whom was a horseman. His gallant steed was cropping the grass beside the towing-path, while he himself was sitting on the bank, admiring the single spur with which economy or lavishness had furnished him. It was his mission to trot unceasingly, never descending from the saddle, even to open gates; to detach the rope at bridges and other obstacles; and to call aloud, a mile before he reached them, 'Lock!' and 'Ferry!' Of his fellows, one was steersman, who stood behind the cabin on an elevation which enabled him to look over it and the other ropeman; and it was the latter's duty to keep the rope clear from piles and brushwood, and to swear at the man on the horse without letting the ladies hear him. The cabin had a fixed table, with comfortable crimson couches running round it, and on the couches six Circassian slaves of exquisite beauty. But no; it was only that Helen had lightly tripped into this floating drawing-room, and seated herself in it with a little cry of pleasure, and since it was wainscoted with mirrors, her presence was multiplied six times. It was impossible for Mrs Somers to trip lightly after her; and because the fairy craft had swayed at the first touch of her foot, she had suddenly altered her opinion of it, and now stood irresolute upon the bank, openly expressing her desire to proceed to Swansdale by railway, in preference to 'that gingerbread thing.' Eventually the same device was adopted that Hannibal found to be so efficacious with his refractory elephants: she was persuaded to step on a plank that she imagined to be dry land, and so transferred herself unconsciously to the centre of the vessel.

When this operation was effected, Arthur took out his watch. 'It is seven o'clock,' said he, 'and I told the animals that the Ark would start a quarter of an hour ago.—Pray, excuse me, ladies, while I fetch them.'

'How funny he is,' whispered Mrs Somers to her daughter. 'I do believe he means the other three gentlemen. Yes; he is going to the house yonder, where he said Mr Thingumbob the Honourable lodged, because the inns were full. Well, it does look like the Ark, now you come to think of it, though I hope it is not wicked to say so. I do hate to think myself wicked on the water, or in any dangerous places.'

The idea is common, though the frank expression of it was Mrs Somers' own: one likes to be on equal terms with Providence, when we imagine ourselves to be out of its favour. Helen's silence, however, betokened disapproval of such sentiments.

'There he is, my dear!' exclaimed her mother suddenly. 'I mean the Honourable.'

'That is Arthur's man with a case of soda-water, mamma,' replied Helen coldly.

'No, no; I mean behind him—yonder. A very striking, gentlemanly person, I must say; in a white hat, with a green veil. O dear! I feel all of a flutter.'

'Honourables' were somewhat scarce in the society in which Mrs Somers 'moved,' which probably accounted for her excitement. Even Helen turned to the open window, and regarded the newcomer with as much interest as an 'engaged young person' could be expected to feel towards any other than the beloved object. He was not young, being decidedly gray; and when his white hat was removed, it displayed a considerable expanse of 'clearing.' But he had bright, bead-like eyes, into which he was always forcing expression; and a stereotyped smile, which he wished it to be understood typified the immortal youth and freshness of his nature. He had an air so jaunty that it was within an ace of swagger; and carried a cane in his hand, with which, as he whistled, he tapped his legs in harmony with the latest popular melody.

'There is certainly a something, Helen,' murmured Mrs Somers, as she regarded this singular object, 'in the air' (she said 'the hair') of a born aristocrat as is different from other people. Now, your poor pa was as good a man as ever stepped, in his own line, but he could never have carried things off in that way.'

'Ladies,' said the object, 'I salute you;' and he raised his white hat, round which the green veil was twisted like a weeper. 'In the absence of our mutual friend Tyndall, I must introduce myself. My name is Paul Jones of Llanerddovey, at your service.'

From that moment of the discovery of her mistake, it is my belief that Mr Jones became an object of personal aversion to good-natured Mrs Somers; and perhaps it was the consciousness of this unmerited dislike that caused her manner to be so very gracious, as she replied: 'Oh, we have often heard Arthur speak of you.—Have we not, Helen? You were at Oxford together, and all that, if I remember right.'

Considering that this supposition would have made Mr Jones at least eight college generations younger than he really was, he ought to have felt himself flattered. But the fact was that Mr Jones had never been at college, nor at any other place of education to speak of; and his keen appreciation of that circumstance led him to regard poor Mrs Somers' observation with irritation. 'No, ma'am; I was never at college,' returned he curtly. 'I was brought up privately in the neighbourhood of our family estate. Mr Tyndall and I have not known one another for any great length of time, though I hope that does not militate against our being fast friends. Why should it do so, when even love itself is born and comes to its full growth in a week, a day, an hour?' Mr Jones slapped his chest with his right hand, extended his left, and struck his foot sharply

upon the cabin floor, like a juggler who has performed a feat successfully. Eloquence was his passion, but elocution was a difficulty with him; and when he had rounded a sentence agreeably to his own taste, he could not conceal his satisfaction.

'What a dreadful person!' murmured Helen, averting her gaze from this curious spectacle, which her mother regarded with curiosity, not unmixed with alarm. It was the attraction of repulsion, but Mr Paul Jones took it for admiration pure and simple.

'Yes, ma'am,' continued he confidentially, 'when I heard that my dear friend Tyndall was smitten so suddenly with the charms of your lovely daughter—which I am sure I should not have wondered at, even had it been sooner—I was delighted. "Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing," I wrote to him, "is one of those rare proverbs in which the sense is not sacrificed to the rhyme. Pray, introduce me; pray, let me enjoy a few hours of her society, if not inconvenient." And by return of post, if I am not mistaken—yes, it was by return of post—he did me the honour to invite me to make one in what I am sure will turn out to be a most *delightful* expedition.' At the word 'delightful,' Mr Paul Jones smiled so profusely that he shewed not only his own teeth, but half-a-dozen others that had been supplied to him by art, with their golden fastenings; and bowed towards Helen, to imply that the source of the promised delightfulness lay there.

'Do you see anybody coming, mamma?' inquired Helen wearily, and in the same despairing tones in which Fatima inquired of her sister whether help might be expected shortly.

'Let me see; let me look,' pleaded Mr Jones with ardour, and standing on his tiptoes, for he was of small stature, to peer over the roof of the cabin. 'Yes, here is Allardyce. You know who Allardyce is, doubtless,' he went on, popping his head in again, and sinking his voice to a whisper: 'one of the Allardyces of Norfolk; brother of the Lord Catamaran, and heir-presumptive to the title. A very particular friend of mine; I gave him up my room at the hotel last night, and took his lodgings instead. He said he couldn't sleep in a lodging-house; whereas I didn't mind one pin. I've been used to roughing it; that is, among the moors, and such-like, you know.' Mr Jones meant the moors of Scotland, but it is not more certain that he had never been on them with a gun in his hand, than that he had never been taken captive by an Algerine corsair. 'Yes,' continued he, as though conscious of some incongruity, in his polished leather boots and veil, with his assumed character of sportsman, 'many a night, with nothing but the blue sky above me, have I lain on the bare heather.'

'Didn't it tickle you?' inquired Mrs Somers.

'My dear madam, I had something *on*,' explained Mr Jones with precipitation. 'I never forgot myself (as many do when in those outlandish regions) to the extent of wearing a kilt, and—a slogan—or whatever it is called. The idea of carrying a knife in one's stocking has always struck me as dangerous, however convenient.'

'I don't know about the convenience, but I call it a very nasty habit,' observed Mrs Somers.—'Dear me, here is Mr Allardyce!'

'In the absence of our friend and host, Mr Tyndall,' exclaimed Mr Paul Jones, 'permit me, ladies, to introduce to you his friend and mine, Mr Allardyce: Mrs Somers, Miss Somers.'

The new-comer was a tall, slight young man, of demure aspect, and dressed with a plainness that contrasted sharply with the taste for colour exhibited in the attire of his companion. He would have been good-looking, but for a certain expression of cynicism, unbecoming enough to youth in any case, but when really characteristic, the index of a wasted life. It is, however, often affected, for, as it is thought fine by some folks, and a proof of their independence of position in life, to be block-heads, so it is held by others to be a great sign of high breeding to be indifferent to all matters of human interest, and profoundly suspicious of their fellow-creatures.

Mr Allardyce had scarcely replaced his hat, after saluting the ladies, when the irrepressible Jones inquired: 'How did you sleep, old fellow?'

'So well,' returned the other, without deigning a glance at his interlocutor, 'that I overslept myself, and have thereby committed the unintentional rudeness of being late. I feel it quite unpardonable, when ladies afford so admirable an example of early rising.'

'I beg you won't mention it, Mister'—Mrs Somers craned at the A, but found it insuperable, and refused the fence. 'I daresay you are not much used to six o'clock breakfasts.'

'I am afraid they are a little novel with me,' said Mr Allardyce, smiling.—'Are you accustomed to gorgeous river-galleys of this sort, Mrs Somers? I don't remember even so much as seeing one before.'

'Well, yes, at the Lord-mayor's show in '39 (you don't remember it, Ellen, dear, because you were not born, but your poor father and I made one of the party); and we lunched on board, just as it might be to-day; and I recollect dear Mr Muntz, the deputy-recorder that was, being most excessively ill afterwards, and laying it all to the motion of the boat. But, then, we were rowed by four-and-twenty men—jerk, jerk—which is not like being towed by a horse; and besides, let us hope that nobody will be so imprudent as to eat raspberry ices after lobster salad, as he did.'

'And is this mode of travelling new to you also, Miss Somers?'

'Quite,' replied Helen. 'It seems to me likely to prove very pleasant. I had no idea there were such vessels.'

'The City Companies have them,' observed Mr Paul Jones, 'and treble the size; the Hat and Cap Makers, for example.'

'I venture to think that this size is preferable,' observed Mr Allardyce, again ignoring Mr Jones' presence, while making use of his remark; 'and I am quite sure that *our* Company, or some of it, at least,' and here he bowed to the ladies, 'will be greatly more agreeable than that of the Hat and Cap Makers. I take it most kind of my friend Tyndall that he should have invited me to make one of so in every way charming an expedition.'

'Here *is* Tyndall coming,' observed Mr Paul Jones, from his old post of observation, his head alone above the cabin roof, while his three-quarter length, counting upwards, still occupied that apartment. 'And I say, Allardyce?'

'Well, what do you say?' He spoke with the most careless air imaginable, but lounged out of the cabin, nevertheless. Not only was there something in the other's tone which was not careless, but, on the contrary, pregnant with annoyance and

disappointment; but there was also a significant beckoning of the fingers.—‘The horse lame? Not a bit of it, you Cockney! You’ll frighten the ladies out of their wits with your mysterious communications.’

But although horse-flesh is always a mysterious subject, and engenders more nods and winks than that of an average state conspiracy, the whispers above the cabin roof had not been concerning it at all.

‘I say, look yonder at whom Tyndall is bringing with him: that fellow Adair is coming with us, it seems.’

‘The devil seize him!’ muttered Allardyce between his teeth, while he waved his thin white hand in sign of welcome to the coming pair. ‘Then we shall have to be doubly careful, or he will spoil sport.’

YESTERDAYS WITH AUTHORS.

WHEN a great man is dead, and one who has known him proceeds to give the public an account of his private life, with extracts from his correspondence, there is sure to be a clamour among the critics about the ‘desecration of the sanctity of home.’ This would be more respectable if it were genuine; but, as matters stand, it only reminds one of the necropolis advertisements—‘the feelings of relatives consulted, and a gravelly soil’—which are but the prelude to business, since there is no literature so popular as the Reminiscences of great A or big B, even with the critics themselves. It gives them an opportunity of stating that *they* too were honoured with the acquaintance of A and B, or, failing that, of giving a sly kick to a dead Lion. Thus, Mr James Fields’ *Yesterdays with Authors** has been much abused—the man scarcely waits till his dead friends are cold, says one (not with reference to Pope, who is one of the authors treated of in the volume, surely!)

‘Proclaim the faults he would not shew!
Break lock and seal; betray the trust!
Keep nothing sacred,’

quotes another sarcastically: but the book is very eagerly read by everybody, nevertheless. In our humble judgment, it deserves to be so. There is little revealed in it, that we can see, which good taste should conceal, or likely to detract from the merits of those of whom it treats. The fastidious delicacy that caused Charles Dickens to burn a mountain of correspondence at Gad’s Hill lest, after his death, its privacy should not be respected, is rare, and, upon the whole, it is fortunate that it should be so. If Boswell had been similarly conscientious, posterity would have been robbed, for the most delightful biography in the language would never have been written.

Whatever sour cynics, shouldering one another to gain a seat at a minister’s table, or standing-room at his lady’s rout, may choose to say, the only really great amongst us are those whose deeds or thoughts live after them, and with the latter class Mr Fields had exceptional opportunities of making acquaintance. As an American publisher of eminence, he has been connected not only with the best authors of his own country,

but also with those of England, by whom the profits of ‘advance sheets’ have been accepted, in the absence of a just law of copyright, upon the principle of half a loaf being better than no bread. Being a man of parts and geniality, these business relations, as they are apt to do—and it is a fact that renders what is called ‘the Trade’ one of the most agreeable of callings—soon merged in his case into intimacy and friendship, and hence this interesting volume of Reminiscences. That the interest is unequal, is only what must be expected; but it is very considerable throughout. If the large space given to Hawthorne seems over-large, the memoir is, even in that respect, characteristic. He was a wordy writer: his immense cake had too few plums in it; and he seems to have been creditably aware of the fact. He had a pleasant, though, strange to say, rough humour, which revealed to him his own deficiencies: of some of his mystic sketches, he confesses, with a burst of charming frankness, that they are also misty. ‘Upon my honour, I am not quite sure that I entirely comprehend my own meaning in some of these blasted allegories.’ This will doubtless annoy the Weak among his admirers, but will do his reputation no real harm. We ourselves only regret that he does not shew himself with equal naturalness in his books as in his letters. From the former, one would never have guessed him to have been such an appreciator of the ridiculous as he really was. ‘I once told him,’ says Mr Fields, ‘of a young woman who brought in a manuscript, and said, as she placed it in my hands: “I don’t know what to do with myself sometimes, I am so filled with *mammoth thoughts*,”’ whereupon the author of the *Scarlet Letter* nearly perished in convulsions of laughter (as indeed any less romantic writer might actually have done). His criticisms were occasionally very manly and graphic. Of the works of Anthony Trollope, he writes: ‘They precisely suit my taste. Solid and substantial; written on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale, and just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business, and not suspecting that they were made a show of. These books are as English as a beefsteak.’ Mr Hawthorne liked beefsteaks when he could get them, but the opportunity of doing so having ceased, he took to abusing the ox from which they were cut. There is no doubt that he repaid the universal hospitality and unstinted admiration of his English cousins with great ungenerousness, and indeed in that matter afforded another proof, unhappily not needed, that a man of genius is not of necessity a gentleman. Here is his own account of a speech he made at a public dinner, given, for all that we know to the contrary, in his own honour; at all events when it was necessary for him to make a speech: ‘I tickled up John Bull’s self-conceit (which is very easily done) with a few sentences of *most outrageous flattery*, and sat down in a general puddle of good-feeling.’

A man who can form such an estimate of ‘good-feeling’ and its causes may well be excused for being ignorant of what constitutes good taste.

Let us turn to metal more attractive—the memoir headed ‘Thackeray.’ In this there are both good and characteristic things. It is well known that the great satirist was not a great speaker; but it will surprise many to learn that he could not speak, extempore, at all, and that even when well

* *Yesterdays with Authors*. By James T. Fields. Sampson Low.

primed, his tongue would often miss fire, a circumstance, however, which did not disturb him in the least. 'Once he asked me to travel with him from London to Manchester to hear a great speech he was going to make at the founding of the Free Library Institution in that city. All the way down he was discoursing of certain effects he intended to produce on the Manchester dons by his eloquent appeals to their pockets. This passage was to have great influence with the rich merchants, this one with the clergy, and so on. He said that although Dickens, and Bulwer, and Sir James Stephen, all eloquent speakers, were to precede him, he intended to beat each of them on this special occasion. He insisted that I should be seated directly in front of him, so that I should have the full force of his magic eloquence. The occasion was a most brilliant one; tickets had been in demand at unheard-of prices several weeks before the day appointed; the great hall, then opened for the first time to the public, was filled by an audience such as is seldom convened, even in England. The three speeches which came before Thackeray was called upon were admirably suited to the occasion, and most eloquently spoken. Sir John Potter, who presided, then rose, and after some complimentary allusions to the author of *Vanity Fair*, introduced him to the crowd, who welcomed him with ringing plaudits. As he rose, he gave me a half-wink from under his spectacles, as if to say: "Now for it; the others have done very well, but I will shew 'em a grace beyond the reach of their art." He began in a clear and charming manner, and was absolutely perfect for three minutes. In the middle of a most earnest and elaborate sentence, he suddenly stopped, gave a look of comic despair at the ceiling, crammed both hands into his trousers' pockets, and deliberately sat down. Everybody seemed to understand that it was one of Thackeray's unfinished speeches, and there were no signs of surprise or discontent among his audience. He continued to sit on the platform in a perfectly composed manner; and when the meeting was over he said to me, without a sign of discomfiture: "My boy, you have my profoundest sympathy; this day you have accidentally missed hearing one of the finest speeches ever composed for delivery by a great British orator." And I never heard him mention the subject again.'

This philosophy of disposition, supposing it was not assumed, must have comforted himself mightily; but it was at times a little trying to his friends. If we are to take Mr Fields' account, indeed, as literally correct, it made him at times insufferably rude. 'I happened to be one of a large company whom he had invited to a six-o'clock dinner at Greenwich one summer afternoon, several years ago. We were all to go down from London, assemble in a particular room at the hotel, where he was to meet us at six o'clock sharp. Accordingly, we took steamer, and gathered ourselves together in the reception-room at the appointed time. When the clock struck six, our host had not fulfilled his part of the contract. His burly figure was yet wanting among the company assembled. As the guests were nearly all strangers to each other, and as there was no one present to introduce us, a profound silence fell upon the room, and we anxiously looked out of the windows, hoping every moment that Thackeray would arrive. This untoward state of things went on for one hour,

still no Thackeray and no dinner. English reticence would not allow any remark as to the absence of our host. Everybody felt serious, and a gloom fell upon the assembled party. Still no Thackeray. The landlord, the butler, and the waiters rushed in and out of the room, shrieking for the master of the feast, who as yet had not arrived. It was confidentially whispered by a fat gentleman, with a hungry look, that the dinner was utterly spoiled twenty minutes ago, when we heard a merry shout in the entry, and Thackeray bounced into the room. He had not changed his morning dress, and ink was still visible upon his fingers. Clapping his hands, and pirouetting briskly on one leg, he cried out: "Thank Heaven, the last sheet of the *Virginians* has just gone to the printer." He made no apology for his late appearance, introduced nobody, shook hands heartily with everybody, and begged us all to be seated as quickly as possible. His exquisite delight at completing his book swept away every other feeling, and we all shared his pleasure, albeit the dinner was overdone throughout.'

This dinner-party must have been composed of persons exceptionally patient, easily mollified, and not particular in their eating. If Mr Fields would 'take three-quarters of an hour off' that hour's waiting, in his next edition, he would greatly oblige all admirers of the author of *Vanity Fair*. What makes the matter worse, Mr Fields suggests, though without intending to do so, that such conduct arose from affection. He narrates that on the occasion of Thackeray's first public appearance in America, he was 'horrified' to hear him say—the lecture being advertised for half-past seven—that he hoped to be ready by eight o'clock, but thought it very doubtful: and on calling on him at fifteen minutes past seven, he finds him 'not only unshaved and undressed for the evening, but rapturously absorbed in making a pen-and-ink drawing to illustrate a passage in the *Sorrows of Werther*, for a lady, which he vowed he would finish before he budged an inch.' Mr Fields says that when Mr Thackeray, who has impaled snobism so skillfully on his rapier, confessed that he himself was 'a snob' past cure, he was 'without doubt' guilty of an exaggeration; and let us hope that these two stories are exaggerated also. For the rest, the great satirist is painted throughout in rose-colour: it is charming to learn of him that in sheer delight at hearing all the seats in the lecture-hall were disposed of, he insisted on thrusting both his legs through the carriage-window on his way thither, out of deference to the ticket-holders; and 'as good as a play' to read what he did, when subjected to the hydraulic pressure of a scientific bore. Mr Fields very imprudently took him to a geological lecture at Boston, though he knew it would be dangerous, and this is what occurred:

'My worst fears were realised. We had hardly got seated, before a dull, bilious-looking old gentleman rose, and applied his anger with such pertinacity that we were all bored nearly to distraction. I dared not look at Thackeray, but I felt that his eye was upon me. My distress may be imagined, when he got up quite deliberately from the prominent place where a chair had been set for him, and made his exit very noiselessly into a small ante-room leading into the larger room, and in which no one was sitting. The small apartment was

dimly lighted, but he knew that I knew *he* was there. Then commenced a series of pantomimic feats impossible to describe adequately. He threw an imaginary person (myself, of course) upon the floor, and proceeded to stab him several times with a paper-folder, which he caught up for the purpose. After disposing of his victim in this way, he was not satisfied, for the dull lecture still went on in the other room, and he fired an imaginary revolver several times at an imaginary head. Still the droning speaker proceeded with his frozen subject (it was something about the Arctic regions, if I remember rightly), and now began the greatest pantomimic scene of all—namely, murder by poison, after the manner in which the player-king is disposed of in *Hamlet*. Thackeray had found a small phial on the mantel-shelf, and out of that he proceeded to pour the imaginary "juice of cursed hebenon" into the imaginary porches of somebody's ears. The whole thing was inimitably done, and I hoped nobody saw it but myself; but years afterwards, a ponderous, fat-witted young man put the question squarely to me: "What was the matter with Mr Thackeray, that night the club met at Mr —'s house?"

The joking was not always upon Thackeray's side, but sometimes indulged in by his admiring friends, at his own expense. In London, he had been very curious about American oysters, about the great size of which marvellous stories had been told him. When he came to Boston, his host took care that the largest specimens of oysters procurable should be placed on the table, at the same time apologising for their being so small. "Six bloated bivalves lay before him in their shells. I noticed that he gazed at them anxiously with fork upraised; then he whispered to me, with a look of anguish: "How shall I do it?" I described to him the simple process by which the free-born citizens of America were accustomed to accomplish such a task. He seemed satisfied that the thing was feasible, selected the smallest one in the half-dozen (rejecting a large one, "because," he said, "it resembled the high-priest's servant's ear that Peter cut off"), and then bowed his head, as if he were saying grace. All eyes were upon him, to watch the effect of a new sensation in the person of a great British author. Opening his mouth very wide, he struggled for a moment, and then all was over. I shall never forget the comic look of despair he cast upon the other five over-occupied shells. I broke the perfect stillness by asking him how he felt. "Profoundly grateful," he gasped, "and as if I had swallowed a little baby."

What Mr Fields has to tell us about Thackeray is mostly of a convivial kind; but to this there is a charming exception, describing the great author's delight over his own daughter's contributions to the *Cornhill*. "When I read her first paper," said he [it was called *Little Scholars*], "I blubbered like a child; it is so good, so simple, so honest; and my little girl wrote it, every word of it."

The gem of Mr Fields' book is undoubtedly that portion of it which refers to Dickens. The letters herein given to us, written by the author of *Pickwick*, are little, if at all, inferior to his published works. For humour, indeed, they are fully equal to the best of them; and when we consider that all this was the mere surplusage

of his vitality and high spirits, thrown off after the book-work of the day was done, they are nothing less than marvellous. They are literally full of fun, with here and there a touch of pathos, or an outbreak of honest indignation, for which one loves the writer more than for the mirth he has afforded us. Some day—when Dickens is sufficiently far removed from us to have robbed envy of its sting—justice will be done him. Comparisons will be made between him and other writers—not as now, for the purpose of throwing cold water upon the fervency of the popular admiration in which he is held, but with calmness and fairness. It will then be seen that, whereas the English humorists who have preceded him have tickled our heart-strings twice or thrice in a page, this man has tickled them twenty times.

The amazing fertility of his fancy has absolutely caused him to be under-rated. In Washington Irving, for instance (for *he* is English), how easy it is to count the plums, to reckon up the 'good things,' in every essay! In Dickens, every line contains a 'good thing.' He does not write sentence after sentence, as Sterne does, to 'lead up' to his facetious stroke; nor, like him, make his bow (as Thackeray calls it), like a tumbler, to signify that the wit is over for that chapter. Other writers emit occasional sparks: with Dickens, it is a perpetual pyrotechnic display. The mere chips from his workshop afford material for other literary carpenters. He was acknowledged, in his lifetime, to be one of the best of our public speakers, as also one of the best of our actors and readers; but it is only after his death that the world at large knows him for one of the best of English letter-writers. The bulk of the present epistles were written to an American gentleman of the name of Felton, whose children have placed them at Mr Fields' disposal. Dickens writes from Fuller's Hotel, Washington, as follows:

"There are very interesting men in this place—highly interesting, of course—but it's not a comfortable place; is it? If spittle could wait at table, we should be nobly attended; but as that property has not been imparted to it in the present state of mechanical science, we are rather lonely and orphan-like, in respect of "being looked after." A blithe black was introduced on our arrival, as our peculiar and especial attendant. He is the only gentleman in the town who has a peculiar delicacy in intruding upon my valuable time. It usually takes seven rings and a threatening message from — to produce him; and when he comes, he goes to fetch something, and, forgetting it by the way, comes back no more. . . .

"What do you think of this incendiary card being left at my door last night? "General G. sends compliments to Mr Dickens, and called with two literary ladies. As the two L. Ls are ambitious of the honor of a personal introduction to Mr D., General G. requests the honor of an appointment for to-morrow." I draw a veil over my sufferings. They are sacred. . . .

"Come to England! Come to England! Our oysters are small, I know—they are said by Americans to be coppery; but our hearts are of the largest size. We are thought to excel in shrimps, to be far from despicable in point of lobsters, and in periwinkles are considered to challenge the universe. Our oysters, small though they be, are not devoid of the refreshing influence

which that species of fish is supposed to exercise in these latitudes. Try them, and compare.'

Again, since his own immortal Sam Weller's remark, that 'he should have to proceed to extremities, as the nobleman said when he cracked the periwinkle in the door,' has there ever been read anything more funny than this account of a squeezed Quaker!

'By-the-bye, if you could only have seen the man at Harrisburg, crushing a friendly Quaker in the parlour-door! It was the greatest sight I ever saw. I had told him not to admit anybody whatever, forgetting that I had previously given this honest Quaker a special invitation to come. The Quaker would not be denied, and H. was stanch. When I came upon them, the Quaker was black in the face, and H. was administering the final squeeze. The Quaker was still rubbing his waistcoat, with an expression of acute inward suffering, when I left the town. I have been looking for his death in the newspapers almost daily.'

Dickens had continuous influenza while in the United States, and he attributed it to the oysters. 'I have long suspected them of a rheumatic tendency. Their feet are always damp; and so much damp company in a man's inside cannot contribute to his peace.' This consideration leads him to reflect on what becomes of the oyster-openers when that mollusc is not in season. 'What do they do? Do they break open tight drawers, and cupboards, and hermetically sealed bottles, for practice? Perhaps they are dentists out of the oyster season! Who knows?'

Well may Mr Fields say: 'What a capital epistolary pen did Dickens hold: his shortest note never without something piquant in it; while a letter was made an entertainment in itself from sheer force of habit. When I think of this man and all the lasting good and abounding pleasure he has brought into the world, I wonder at the superstition that dares to arraign him.' To read of his trip into Cornwall with Forster, Maclise, and Stanfield—too long, alas, for quotation here—is to yearn to have been of that pleasant party, of whom Dickens was the life and the soul. He was none of those dry wits who never smile at their own good things—as though they were good enough for other people, but not for them, or else because they have repeated them so often that there is no pleasure left in them; he enjoyed his own fun, and that of others also, like a man. 'I never laughed in my life,' says he, 'as I did on this journey. I was choking and gasping, and bursting the buckle off the back of my stock' [this was in 1842] 'all the way. And Stanfield (who is very much of your figure and temperament, but fifteen years older) got into such apoplectic entanglements, that we were often obliged to beat him on the back with portmanteaus before we could recover him. Seriously, I do believe there never was such a trip.' And indeed we think that quite likely.

No one who enjoyed the friendship of Dickens can have failed to have been struck with the deep-down delight he took in the contemplation of eccentricity, and his good-natured appreciation of absolute ignorance. One of the many guests whom his hospitality welcomed was a certain sea-captain, of whose manliness, honesty, and good temper he has much to say, and, of course, to his discredit nothing. Only, taking him to Drury Lane to see *Much Ado about Nothing*, 'I never could find out,

he writes, 'what he meant by turning round, after he had watched the first two scenes with great attention, and inquiring "whether it was a Polish piece." There is not another word about it; but what hours of private mirth, of convulsive struggles to restrain himself from shrieking with delight in public places, must that incident have afforded him! Here is such a description of a funeral, as, were it to appear in any man's 'Literary Works,' would insure a reputation; but it only forms a portion of a letter to Mr Felton, that is almost as good throughout, and was probably dashed off in five minutes:

'You know H——'s book, I daresay. Ah! I saw a scene of mingled comicality and seriousness at his funeral some weeks ago, which has choked me at dinner-time ever since. C—— and I went as mourners; and as he lived, poor fellow, five miles out of town, I drove C—— down. It was such a day as I hope, for the credit of nature, is seldom seen in any parts but these—muddy, foggy, wet, dark, cold, and unutterably wretched in every possible respect. Now, C—— has enormous whiskers, which straggle all down his throat in such weather, and stick out in front of him like a partially unravelled bird's-nest; so that he looks queer enough at the best, but when he is very wet, and in a state between jollity (he is always very jolly with me) and the deepest gravity (going to a funeral, you know), it is utterly impossible to resist him; especially as he makes the strangest remarks the mind of man can conceive, without any intention of being funny, but rather meaning to be philosophical. I really cried with an irresistible sense of his comicality all the way; but when he was dressed out in a black cloak and a very long black hat-band by an undertaker (who, as he whispered me with tears in his eyes—for he had known H—— many years—was "a character, and he would like to sketch him"), I thought I should have been obliged to go away. However, we went into a little parlour where the funeral party was, and God knows it was miserable enough, for the widow and children were crying bitterly in one corner, and the other mourners—mere people of ceremony, who cared no more for the dead man than the hearse did—were talking quite coolly and carelessly together in another; and the contrast was as painful and distressing as anything I ever saw. There was an independent clergyman present, with his hands on and a Bible under his arm, who, as soon as we were seated, addressed C—— thus, in a loud, emphatic voice: "Mr C——, have you seen a paragraph respecting our departed friend, which has gone the round of the morning papers?" "Yes, sir," says C——, "I have;" looking very hard at me the while, for he had told me with some pride coming down that it was his composition. "Oh!" said the clergyman. "Then you will agree with me, Mr C——, that it is not only an insult to me, who am the servant of the Almighty, but an insult to the Almighty, whose servant I am." "How is that, sir?" said C——. "It is stated, Mr C——, in that paragraph," says the minister, "that when Mr H—— failed in business as a bookseller, he was persuaded by me to try the pulpit, which is false, incorrect, unchristian, in a manner blasphemous, and in all respects contemptible. Let us pray." With which, my dear Felton, and in the same breath, I gave you my word, he knelt down, as we all did, and began a very miserable

jumble of an extemporary prayer. I was really penetrated with sorrow for the family, but when C— (upon his knees, and sobbing for the loss of an old friend) whispered me, "that if that wasn't a clergyman, and it wasn't a funeral, he'd have punched his head," I felt as if nothing but convulsions could possibly relieve me.'

It is surely with no exaggeration that Mr Fields observes of such a letter-writer as this, that when we read his friendly epistles, we cannot help wishing he had written letters only, as when we read his novels, we grudge the time he employed on anything else. Here is a picture of himself at Broadstairs (while engaged on *Martin Chuzzlewit*), drawn by his own graphic hand: 'In a bay-window in a one pair sits from nine o'clock to one a gentleman with rather long hair and no neckcloth, who writes and grins as if he thought he were very funny indeed. His name is Boz. At one he disappears, and presently emerges from a bathing-machine, and may be seen—a kind of salmon-coloured porpoise—splashing about in the ocean. After that he may be seen in another bay-window on the ground-floor, eating a strong lunch; after that, walking a dozen miles or so, or lying on his back in the sand reading a book. Nobody bothers him unless they know he is disposed to be talked to; and I am told he is very comfortable indeed. He's as brown as a berry, and they do say is a small fortune to the innkeeper who sells beer and cold punch. But this is mere rumour. Sometimes he goes up to London (eighty miles, or so, away), and then I'm told there is a sound in Lincoln Inn Fields at night, as of men laughing, together with a clinking of knives and forks and wine-glasses.'

And here it is well to remark, upon Mr Fields' authority (which can be amply corroborated by all who knew Dickens), that, notwithstanding the many references to eating and drinking, and creature comforts generally, in the writings of the great novelist, it was hard to find a man who ate or drank or 'coddled' himself less than he. 'He liked to dilate in imagination over the brewing of a bowl of punch, but I always noticed that when the punch was ready, he drank less of it than other persons. It was the sentiment of the thing, and not the thing itself, that engaged his attention.' And also, perhaps, we should take it into the account that at one time in his life—as has only of late been made known to the world at large—a good dinner must have seemed such an inestimable blessing, as those alone who have suffered from the pangs of poverty can understand. That that bitter experience also helped to make him so pre-eminently the friend of the poor, we have little doubt: they were never forgotten by him; and many an instance could be quoted from this volume of his unpretending kindness. Mr Fields accompanied him to many a dreadful haunt of poverty and wretchedness—notably to the 'opium dens' described in *Edwin Drood*—and records his never-failing generous sympathy with want and woe. He snatches a little child, filthy with dirt and worse, out of its drunken mother's arms, and sees that it is warmed and cared for; he rushes across the snow-bound street to help the Blind. That his purse was always open to relieve the needy, was a small thing compared to the riches that he gave them from his heart. The pains and trouble that he took with his works, were a lesson to all writers to come. His studies were all from

life, and his observation was untiring. When engaged upon *Hard Times*, he arranged with the proprietor of Astley's Circus to spend days behind the scenes with the riders and among the horses; and when *The Tale of Two Cities* was occupying his thoughts, he banished himself to France for years. All this, indeed, all who knew him, knew before; but it is pleasant to have the facts recorded by so genial a biographer; and if there were nothing else in *Yesterdays with Authors* but this memoir of Charles Dickens, it would be a valuable and entertaining book. There is much more, however, which only lack of space forbids us to quote; and notably, a memoir of Mary Russell Mitford, comprising over a hundred pages of her charming letters. While we are reading *Yesterdays with Authors*, it seems, indeed, that they are once more with us To-day; and our thanks are due to him who has reproduced them for our pleasure.

A STORY OF DESERTION.

AMONG the artillerymen belonging to the garrison of St Helena in 1799 were John Browne and William McKinnon. These two men were fast friends and inseparable companions; but while the Englishman was content to take things as they came, and make the best of his lot, the Scotsman was perpetually harping upon the hardship of being cooped up in a dull place like St Helena. At last he ventured to propose that they should desert their colours; in vain his friend pointed out the unlikelihood of effecting their escape, and dwelt upon the penalty awaiting failure. McKinnon's home-fever was too strong upon him for arguments to avail, and the discussion eventually ended in Browne's adhesion.

Carefully sounding such of their comrades as they could trust, the two would-be deserters succeeded in prevailing upon Samuel McQuin, Charles Brighthouse, Terence Conway, and William Parr to take part in the desperate adventure, and hold themselves ready to seize the first opportunity of getting away from the island. The opportunity soon came. The *Columbia*, an American vessel, arrived in the bay, and Parr's persuasive tongue induced the captain to promise whatever assistance he could render. Accordingly, when the six adventurers met at the West Rock upon the evening of the 8th of June, they found a boat waiting there for them. As soon as they got on board, uniforms were doffed in exchange for seamen's clothes. Then, when night came—so that suspicion might be diverted from the *Columbia*—they ventured into the harbour and cut out a whale-boat, in which (after taking in a quadrant and sextant, and some bread and water from the American) they stood out to sea, to lie off the island at a safe distance, until their friend should pick them up. They were, however, disappointed in their expectations; for some reason or another, the *Columbia* never came near; and by noon on the second day it was apparent to all that they must rely upon their own strength of arm and stoutness of heart to carry them to a haven of safety.

Parr was the only man in the boat with any pretensions to seamanship. He proposed to bear away for Ascension Island, which, though uninhabited and barren, was often visited by East Indians for the sake of its turtle. Disguised as they were, the deserters thought they might easily pass themselves

off for shipwrecked sailors, and have little difficulty in obtaining a passage in some homeward-bound ship. They were but ill prepared for a six hundred mile journey across ocean; the boat leaked, so as to require constant baling; and their provisions, all told, consisted of twenty-five pounds of bread and thirteen gallons of fresh water. No one, however, cared to suggest a return to St Helena; so, making a sail of their handkerchiefs, they started on their perilous way, their frail craft speeding rapidly before a north-west gale.

On the morning of the 18th of June several flights of birds were seen, but eyes were vainly strained to catch a glimpse of land. Parr announced his opinion that they had passed Ascension Island; shirts were pressed into service to form a sprit-sail, and the course was altered, in the hope of making Rio Janeiro. By this time their slender store of food had sadly diminished, and they resolved to limit themselves to an ounce of bread and two mouthfuls of water per day for each man. Day by day their strength sank and their spirits with it; M'Kinnon being the saddest of that sad crew, reproaching himself with being the first cause of the sufferings he shared. But worse was to come; the last morsel of bread was eaten, the last drop of water drunk, no sail could be seen, no signs of land appeared to impart a little hope to the enfeebled, wasted, despairing men. Some sought to relieve their inflamed throats by sucking pieces of bamboo; Browne, recalling some sea-story to mind, soaked a piece of his shoe in salt water, but was glad to throw it away after tasting it. He then cut up the inner sole, dividing it with his comrades in misfortune, but no one received any benefit from his generosity. The weary days and wearier nights sped on, and yet they lived, having existed for eight days upon an ounce of bread and a few drops of water, and for five days upon nothing at all. Then Parr contrived to catch a dolphin, for which they all thanked God devoutly. The fish lasted them for four days; when it was finished, Parr, Browne, Brighthouse, and Conway were for scuttling the boat, and thus ending their misery. The other two objected, arguing, that 'God, who had made man, always found him something to eat;' but their faith failed them at last, and then

One whispered his companion, who
Whispered another, and thus it went round,
And then into a hoarser murmur grew,
An ominous, and wild, and desperate sound;
And when his comrade's thought each sufferer
knew,
'Twas but his own, suppressed till now, he found;
And out they spoke of lots for flesh and blood,
And who should die to be his fellows' food!

Parr was not allowed to take his chance with the rest, because he had but lately recovered from an infectious disease. He numbered five pieces of paper, folded them up, and threw them into a hat, from which the others drew them; upon opening these, the fatal number, five, was found to have fallen upon M'Kinnon, the suggester of the lottery. He quietly took up a sharpened nail, opened three veins, and was quickly out of his trouble. The horrified lookers-on were in no haste to make the meal for which they had provided, but turned their eyes away from their dead friend. Hungry necessity at last overcame all scruples, and before M'Kinnon's corpse was cold, a piece was cut off the thigh, and

a small portion served out among them. Every two hours the body was dipped in the sea, to preserve it from putrefaction, and spite of the disgust they felt at the horrid food, it answered its purpose, of keeping a little life in them, and the sacrifice was not made in vain.

Three days after the acting of this tragedy, Browne observed at daybreak a change in the colour of the water, and when the daylight grew stronger, land was discerned. Revived by the welcome sight, all exerted themselves to their poor utmost, and by eight o'clock they were close on the shore; they

Were mad for land, and thus their course they ran,
Though right ahead the roaring breakers lay;
A reef between them also now began
To shew its boiling surf and bounding spray;
But finding no place for their landing better,
They ran the boat for shore—and overset her,

and in a moment were battling for dear life with the angry waters. Browne, Conway, and Parr, after a hard struggle, got safe footing on land, but the other two were swept away by the waves and drowned.

Sore in body and sad at heart, the three battered survivors dragged their aching limbs to a hut upon the beach, and exchanged dismal congratulations. But fortune had not yet dealt her last buffet. The hut was tenanted by an old Indian woman and her son, the former of whom disappeared immediately after the intrusion of the strangers into her domicile; and in less than two hours' time the place was surrounded by armed men. Before the objects of the commotion could think of resistance, they found themselves seized, tied by the hands and feet, slung upon bamboos, and on their way to some unknown destination. After travelling in this uncomfortable fashion for three miles or so, their captors halted at a village or small town, unslung their prisoners, and put them into a rude sort of prison, where they lay, half dead with hunger and exhaustion, exposed to the derision of brutal sightseers. This state of torment, however, did not last long. The governor of the place paid them a visit, and, as soon as he discovered they were not Frenchmen, ordered them to be carried to his own house, where a few days of kind and judicious treatment worked wonders. They learned from their host that they were in Portuguese hands, and in Brazil, Parr accounting for their uninvited presence by attributing it to the wreck of the *Sally* of Liverpool, a ship bound for Jamaica, of which his father was owner and he captain.

To amuse his guests, the governor took them to an Indian festival, where they were the observed of all observers; Parr's handsome person, in particular, exciting the curiosity and admiration of the dusky beauties of the forest. The chief's daughter lost her heart at sight, and offered to accept him as a husband then and there. Parr was rather taken aback at this sudden proposal, but returned his thanks for the unexpected honour, begging at the same time to defer the nuptial ceremony until his next coming; whereupon the lady burst into tears, tore off her head-feathers, and 'vented her indignation as naturally as any European female would have done on the same occasion.' Parr proved equal to the crisis. Rising from his seat, he made his way to the angry maiden's side, and, despite the difficulty of saying sweet things through an interpreter, succeeded in mollifying the offended

damsel. They parted most affectionately, Parr undertaking to return in a few days for his bride, without, it must be owned, having the slightest idea of keeping his word; but, under the circumstances, the breach of promise was excusable.

As soon as they had quite recovered the effects of their ill-starred voyage, the Englishmen were sent on to San Salvador. Here every one tried to make them forget their misfortunes. The governor clothed them like gentlemen, started a subscription for their benefit, and made much of them in every way. Invitations poured in thickly upon them. Conway and Browne were invited out of pity and politeness, but their companion was in general request for his own sake. Parr, who must have been the ne'er-do-well of some good family, had the happy knack of accommodating himself to all companies, and making himself at home anywhere. At the first ball to which they went, while his friends were sitting down quietly looking at the flying feet of the dancers, Parr was busy explaining the movements of an English country-dance, illustrating his description by leading off with the governor's daughter; footing it so neatly, that Conway, with a touch of envy, declared he must have been a dancing-master. Good-looking, well-mannered, ready-witted, he danced himself into everybody's good graces; all doors were open to him, and a merry time he had of it.

Not content with obtaining partners in the dance, Parr sought to secure a partner for life. He fell desperately in love with a beautiful girl named Olympia Alvarez, and undaunted by the fact that he could only offer her an empty hand, while she was the only child of one of the richest merchants in San Salvador, lost no time in letting her know the state of his feelings. The lady was not blind to the personal merits of the daring aspirant, but pride stood in the way of her surrendering without parley to an unknown foreigner, who was living upon charity. She professed to be astonished at his audacity, although no doubt she liked him the better for it; but fate was in his favour, and a happy accident made him master of the situation. One day, Alvarez, his daughter, and her by no means hopeless lover, took part in a water picnic; the boat, by some mismanagement, struck upon a shelving rock, and Olympia was thrown overboard. Parr was in the water in a moment, and the girl's life saved; and, with feminine logic, she persuaded herself that her life belonged to the man who had risked his own in her behalf, and resolved to make him a tender of it. She accordingly despatched her confessor—a very Friar Lawrence—with a letter asking Parr to meet her at church upon a certain evening. The exultant lover was punctual to the appointment; his friend Browne was with him, and there too was Olympia, cloaked and veiled, with her convenient confessor at her side. A few low words passed between the pair; the priest unlocked a door, and all passed into a little chapel lit by one small taper; and when Browne departed for his lodgings, he left his comrade behind him, a married man.

The bold bridegroom passed his wedding night beneath the roof of his unconscious father-in-law, and the happy couple contrived to meet by stealth every day. But the fear of detection became too strong for the new-made wife's nerves, and one fine morning Alvarez missed his daughter, and

Browne missed his friend. The news ran through the town. The enraged father hastened to the governor, who despatched thirty cavalry soldiers armed with carbines and sabres in pursuit of the fugitives, Browne being permitted to accompany them. They travelled for hours without striking the trail, but just as the sun was setting, a loud shriek of distress startled their ears. They hastened on, and soon found the objects of their pursuit literally up a tree, round the trunk of which a huge snake was coiled on hostile thoughts intent. How the lady managed to attain the elevated position she shared with her husband, is a mystery the narrator of the story forgot to solve. The soldiers would have charged the hungry reptile, but their horses had an opinion of their own as to the advisability of the proceeding, and refused to budge an inch. Jumping off his steed, Browne advanced towards the tree with his carbine cocked: as he raised his piece, the serpent gave a terrible hiss, and Olympia, slipping from her husband's protecting arms, fell to the ground, and Parr leaped down after her. For a moment, Browne was disconcerted, but recovering himself, he fired. The ball entered the serpent's neck; and seeing him thus disabled, the troopers, dismounting, rushed in upon it, and despatched it with their sabres.

Not caring for a night-journey through the forests, the party camped out until morning, starting homeward with the break of day. The governor received the prisoners very kindly; and the old merchant, like a sensible man, seeing what was done could not be undone, made the best of the business, and carried his daughter and son-in-law home with him. Others were not so forgiving. Certain disappointed individuals, enraged at the Englishman winning the prize for which they had vainly contended, hired some ruffians to waylay Parr and his wife as they came out of the theatre one night. Browne, who was with them, wrested a sword from one of the assailants, and did good service, until he was cut down. The screams of the lady brought the soldiers out, and the young couple escaped unharmed. The affair so alarmed Alvarez, that he determined to leave San Salvador, and accordingly left by the first ship bound for Lisbon. Conway was one of the party, but they were reluctantly compelled to leave Browne behind, as he had not sufficiently recovered from his wounds.

Unfortunately for himself, he was strong enough to go about by the time *H. M. S. Diomedé* put into San Salvador, and fell into the clutches of a pressgang on the look-out for any of their countrymen who might serve their turn. Browne had his choice, either to remain on that station, or go to the Cape of Good Hope. He chose the latter alternative, and in due time was entered as a seaman on board *H. M. S. Leander*. In 1801, he was transferred to the *Duke of Clarence*, and after a cruise in the Atlantic, found himself back at St Helena. Making a virtue of necessity, he gave himself up as a deserter, and related all that had befallen him since he left His Majesty's service without leave or license. Thinking the crime had brought its own punishment in his case, the authorities allowed him to depart for England by the first homeward-bound vessel; and when he got there, Browne, 'to deter others from engaging in such a foolish enterprise,' wrote a narrative of the adventures of the six deserters; a narrative

Grenville thought worthy of a place in his library, and which Byron did not disdain to turn to account.

THE RING OF RINGS.

WHERE or when the ring was first adopted as a badge of matrimony, it is utterly impossible to say. We have a shadowy recollection of reading somewhere that Tubal Cain fashioned the first ring, and not knowing what to do with it when he had made it, consulted Adam on the matter, and, by his advice, gave the ring to his son, that he might espouse a wife with it. It is very doubtful, however, if the ancient Hebrews used marriage-rings, although the words of the Jewish betrothal service, 'Behold thou art betrothed unto me with this ring, according to the rites of Moses and Israel,' almost assert that they did. An old writer says the ancient Jews acknowledged the planet Jupiter to be a star having favourable influences, and it was customary among them for a newly married man to give his bride a ring with the planet's name engraved upon it, so that she might be delivered of all her children under Jupiter's benign auspices. If the wedding-ring was indeed an Israelitish institution, it is strange that it is never alluded to in Holy Writ or mentioned by the Talmudists. Selden goes so far as to declare the Jews were the very last people to adopt the use of it; nevertheless, the nuns of St Anne, at Rome, believe themselves blessed in possessing the marriage-ring of their saint, the mother of the Virgin—a rudely made silver ring; and, according to monkish legends, Joseph and Mary were married with a ring, onyx and amethyst. This ring was found by somebody in 996, and given by a Jerusalem jeweller to a lapidary living at Elusium, who, from lack of faith, set no value upon the relic until a miracle opened his eyes to its genuineness. He presented it to a church, where it worked wonderful cures upon ailing believers. In 1473, some sacrilegious rascal robbed the church of its treasure, after which, as such things were wont to do, it increased and multiplied, and was exhibited at divers churches in different parts of Europe.

In his *Book on the Common Prayer*, Wheatley calls the ring a visible pledge of the man's fidelity, 'which, by the First Common Prayer Book of King Edward VI., was accompanied with other tokens of spousage in gold and silver.' This lets us into the meaning and design of the ring, and intimates it to be the remains of an ancient custom, whereby it was usual for the man to purchase the woman, laying down for the price of her a certain sum of money; or else performing certain articles or conditions which the father of the damsel would accept as an equivalent. Among the Romans, this was called coemption or purchasing, and was accounted the firmest kind of marriage which they had. Pliny tells us it was customary to send an iron ring without any stone in it, by way of present to a woman upon her betrothal, a fashion probably springing out of another Roman custom, the giving of a ring as earnest, upon the conclusion of a bargain. At her actual marriage, the Roman bride usually received a ring bearing the figure of a key upon it, in token that henceforth she would be charged with the keys of her husband's house; and sometimes the keys themselves were handed over to her at the same time.

When an Anglo-Saxon bachelor and maiden were betrothed, they exchanged presents or 'weds,' and the gentleman gave his lady-love a solemn kiss as he placed a ring upon her right hand, to remain there until he himself transferred it to her left hand when the second and final ceremonial took place. In later times, wedding-rings were hallowed before being put to their proper use, by sprinkling with holy water, and the offering of a special prayer for the benefit of the wearer. When the bridegroom spoke the words endowing his bride with all his worldly goods, he put the ring upon her thumb, saying: 'In the name of the Father;' then upon her forefinger, saying: 'In the name of the Son;' next upon her middle finger: 'In the name of the Holy Ghost;' finally placing the ring upon the woman's fourth finger as he said 'Amen!' and there he left it. Several reasons have been advanced for the selection of the fourth finger. 'An opinion there is,' says Sir Thomas Browne, 'which magnifies the fourth finger of the left hand; presuming therein a cordial relation, that a particular vessel, nerve, vein, or artery, is conferred thereto from the heart, and thereof, that especially hath the honour to bear our rings.' The fourth finger was said to be the last to succumb to the gout, was known among ancient physicians as the healing finger, and always used by them in stirring their mixtures, in the belief that nothing harmful to health could come in contact with it, without its immediately making a sort of telegraphic communication of the fact to the heart of the stirrer. Those who disbelieve in any physical connection between the fourth finger and the supposed seat of love, may take their choice of the following reasons why that particular digit should be the ring-finger. The thumb and first two fingers being reserved as symbols of the Blessed Trinity, the reservation left the fourth finger the first available for the distinction. The fourth finger is guarded on either side by its fellows, and is the only finger on the hand that cannot be extended without one or other of them following its movements. It is the least active finger of the least-used hand, upon which the ring may be always in sight and yet subjected to the least wear. Although the most commonplace, the last seems to us to be the best solution of the question; but if the Roman ladies were the first to don the marriage-ring, it is not unlikely that they merely imitated their lords and masters, who wore their official rings upon the fourth finger.

Although the ring was always placed upon the fourth finger in church, it was not always allowed to remain there. English ladies were wont, at one time, to transfer the golden fetter to their thumbs, a custom perhaps originated by some high-born bride whose finger, like that of Suckling's heroine,

Was so small, the ring
Would not stay on which they did bring—
It was too wide a peck.

At Stanford Court, Worcestershire, may be seen the portraits of five ladies of the Salway family who lived in the days of Queen Bess, all of whom carry their wedding-rings upon their thumbs. Buller bears witness to the practice in his lines—

Others were for abolishing
That tool of matrimony, a ring,
With which th' unsanctified bridegroom
Is married only to a thumb!

And according to the *British Apollo*, the brides of George I.'s time used to remove the ring from its proper abiding-place to the thumb, as soon as the ceremony was over. In a translation of a French version of the story of Patient Grisél, dated 1619, that much enduring, benighted matron, who had not the faintest notion of sexual equality, says to her hard-hearted lord, when departing from his house in the scantiest of costumes: 'Your jewels are in the wardrobe, and even the ring with which you married me withal, in the chamber!' Was the leaving the ring in the chamber only an additional sacrifice on the part of the over-patient wife, or may we infer that the married ladies of the time did not always carry the mark of their matronhood about with them? We wonder much that the agitating sisterhood of our time have not yet raised their shrill protest against the sex wearing the wedding-ring at all; or, at least, rebelled at its being worn upon the left hand, seeing that betokens the inferiority and subjection of the wearer, the right hand signifying power, independence, and authority, and the left exactly the contrary.

Tertullian, despite of Pliny's testimony, was inclined to believe that the Romans used gold wedding-rings as more symbolical of the generous, sincere, long-lasting affection that ought to subsist between man and wife; but in this matter we would rather take the pagan's word. Swinburne says it is of no moment of what metal the ring is made, the form being round and without end, importing that the love of those it unites shall circulate and flow continuously. But a thirteenth century bishop advances excellent reasons why the ring of rings should be of gold. He tells us that one Protheus made a ring of iron with an adamant enclosed therein, as a pledge of love; because, as iron subdueth all things, so doth love conquer all things, since nothing is more violent than its ardour; and as an adamant cannot be broken, so love cannot be overcome, for love is strong as death. In course of time, golden rings set with gems were substituted for the adamantine ones of baser metal, because—the worthy bishop explains—as gold excelleth all other metals, so doth love excel all other blessings; and as gold is set off by gems, so is conjugal love set off by other virtues. With such thorough appreciation of the honour due to love and matrimony, we cannot help wondering how the writer of such warm words ever reconciled himself to a celibate profession.

Many people believe that a marriage cannot be legally performed with a ring of any material save gold; and it was customary, not very long ago, in some parts of Ireland, to hire a gold ring for the occasion, and return it when the pair were safely bound. Marriages, however, have been celebrated with nothing better than a brass curtain-ring; and stories are told of the church key being pressed into service. The editor of *Notes and Queries* relates a strange tale of a bridegroom's readiness when he discovered he had left the all-important circlet behind him. The young daughter of a certain widow, as young daughters are apt to do, bestowed her affections upon a gentleman whose merits the widow could not appreciate. Knowing, probably from experience, what head-strong creatures love-smitten young folks are, the old lady kept strict watch and ward over the misguided maiden, but, as might have been expected, one old head was no match for two young hearts.

One day the widow awoke to the fact that she wanted a new pair of shoes, and set off with her daughter to the shoemaker's. Seizing the opportunity when mamma was sitting with one shoe off and one shoe on, the damsel slipped out of the shop, and hid her to the church; where, by a wonderful coincidence, she found a clergyman, his clerk, and a young gentleman with a license in his pocket. All went well until it was necessary to produce the ring, when, to every one's dismay, it was not forthcoming. The bridegroom, however, was not daunted by such a trifle; he pulled off a glove, whipped out his penknife, cut a ring of leather, placed it upon the lady's finger, and had the supreme felicity of being hailed a married man, just as the indignant widow burst into the church, too breathless to give vent to her anger.

A Jewish bridegroom could not have resorted to such an expedient, for, according to Jewish laws, it is necessary that the ring should be of a certain value, certified by the officiating rabbi. It must also be the absolute property of the bridegroom, and not obtained either upon credit or by gift. The action of placing the ring upon the woman's finger is so binding, that if nothing more be done, neither party can contract a marriage without first obtaining a divorce. No Jewish wedding-rings are known to be in existence of an earlier date than the sixteenth century. There are two Jewish marriage-rings in the South Kensington Museum; one is a broad gold band enriched with bosses in filigree; the other of gold enamel, with an inscription running round the broad margin in raised enamel letters, and having fixed upon one side a turret with triangular angles and movable vanes. The late Lord Londesborough possessed a Hebrew ring of richly enamelled gold, decorated with beautiful filigree-work; and, attached by a hinge to the collet, in place of a setting, was a small ridged capsule like the gabled roof of a house, and inside the ring two Hebrew words were inscribed. Most Jewish rings bear a sentiment more or less appropriate, a favourite one being, 'Joy be with you.'

Posies or mottoes were generally inscribed upon the flat inner side of wedding-rings in the sixteenth century. The ring with which Henry VIII. wedded Anne of Cleves bore the significantly appropriate prayer, 'God send me well to keepe.' Such inscriptions as, 'Amor vincit omnia'; 'Tout mon cœur'; 'Gift and giver, your servants ever'; 'No gift can shew the love I owe,' although met with upon marriage-rings, were surely intended rather for betrothal rings. Some sanguinely promise an eternity of connubial bliss:

Death never parts
Such loving hearts.

Others are of an admonitory order, such as:

Silence ends strife
With man and wife.

Where hearts agree,
There God will be.

What could be more admirably adapted for a man inclined to embrace matrimony upon the principle of limited liability, and chary of undertaking to love and cherish a wife who might prove all worse and no better, than the couplet:

As true to thee
As thou to me!

But in frankness, even this is surpassed by Bishop Thomas's motto for his fourth wife's ring :

If I survive,
I'll make them five.

In 1659, some one advertised the loss of 'a ring, which was a wedding-ring, tyed with a black ribbon, and two black little ones, with a lock of hair in it : the posie United Hearts, death only parts.' Within the last year or two, posie wedding-rings have re-appeared ; but whether the attempted revival has proved a successful one is more than we know. A more modern form of motto-ring is that wherein the words are formed by the initial letters of the stones arranged around the hoop, and for wedding 'keepers' the gems are made to spell out the bridegroom's Christian name.

Another and older kind of wedding-ring was the gimmel-ring, in vogue when the ceremony of marriage was preceded by that of betrothal. The gimmel was a double or triple ring, formed of two or three links turning upon a pivot. At the betrothal the parties concerned broke the ring asunder, each retaining a link, to serve as a reminder of the engagement until they ratified it at the altar, when the parts were reunited, and served for the marriage-ring. These rings were usually ornamented with a pair of clasped hands enclosing a heart, a device in such favour that it was transferred to the ordinary wedding-ring. The fisher population of the Claddagh still acknowledge no other pattern, and the wedding-ring is with them an heirloom, regularly transferred from the mother to the daughter who first aspires to wifehood. The brides of the Claddagh, in finding their own rings, reverse the rule obtaining everywhere else. It is the privilege and duty of the happy man to provide the binding golden hoop. When Lord Milton took unto himself a wife, the ring with which he wedded her was in its way unique, for he had, with his own hands, fashioned it from a nugget found by him in British Columbia, while staying at the diggings there, after overcoming the dangers of the North-west Passage by land.

Lost wedding-rings have sometimes been strangely recovered. A matron of East Lulworth lost her ring one day : two years afterwards she was peeling some potatoes, brought from a field half a mile distant from her cottage, and upon dividing a double one, came upon the lost matrimonial circlet. A Mrs Montjoy of Brechin, when feeding a calf, let it suck her fingers, and on withdrawing her hand discovered, to her dismay, that her wedding-ring and keeper had both disappeared. Believing the calf was the innocent thief, she refused to part with it, and after keeping the animal for three years, had it slaughtered, and sure enough the long absent rings were found in its intestines, as clean and bright as when their owner last saw them on her finger. A wealthy German farmer living near Nordanhamn employed himself one day in 1871 in making flour-balls for his cattle ; when he had finished his work, he found his hand minus his wedding-ring, bearing his wife's name, it being the German custom for bride and bridegroom to exchange rings. Soon afterwards, the farmer sold seven bullocks, which the purchaser shipped to England on board the *Adler* cattle-steamer on the twenty-sixth of October. Two days afterwards, an English smack, the *Mary Ann*, of Colchester, picked up at sea the still warm carcass of a

bullock, which was opened by the crew to obtain some fat wherewith to grease the rigging. Inside the animal they found a gold ring, inscribed with a woman's name and the date 1869. Captain Tye reported the circumstance as soon as he arrived in port, and handed the ring over to an official, who sent it up to London. The authorities set to work to trace its ownership, and found that the only ship reporting the loss of a beast, that could have passed the *Mary Ann*, was the steamer *Adler*, from which a bullock, supposed to be dead, had been thrown overboard on the 28th of October. Meanwhile, the *Shipping Gazette* recording the finding of the ring had reached Nordanhamn, and one of its readers there recognised the name inscribed upon it : communications were opened with the farmer ; and in due time he and his wife rejoiced over the recovery of the pledge they thought lost for ever. That they should have recovered it, under the circumstances, was certainly surprising ; but there was nothing so very wonderful in a ring being found in the inside of a bullock, that 'comic' writers should treat the story as the pure invention of some penny-a-liner. Any slaughterer of cattle would have told them such 'finds' are by no means uncommon, and we know for a fact that the wife of a London slaughterman displays upon her hand two rings thus found by her husband.

WATCHING.

Yes, it will soon be the dawn, dear ; the darkness is lingering still,

But I know it is almost the morning, the air is so hushed and so chill.

Can you lie silent no longer ? Indeed, if you can, it is best,

For sometimes you sleep towards morning—try to be quiet and rest.

Is it the pain that disturbs you ? Your forehead feels hot to my palm.

I hoped that the fever had left you, you lay there so patient and calm.

Is it so hard to bear, dear ? I know it is hard, by your smile.

Ah ! if I only could take it, and let you be free for awhile !

Weary ? No, I am not weary ; only of seeing you so.

Do not you trouble for me, dear ; I rest in the daytime, you know.

Just let me straighten your pillow, and darken the light from your sight—

All I can do is so little, the aid I can give is so slight !

Yes, I can see at the window, the dawning begins to grow strong.

Though you are always so patient, I know that you find the hours long.

But now that the pain is more easy, while yet the night-silence is deep,

Perhaps you may still get some rest, dear ; try to be quiet and sleep.

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